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Narrative and understanding persons

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Narrative and understanding persons

Abstract

Our world is replete with narratives—narratives of our making that are uniquely appreciated by us. This can hardly be denied, certainly if by ‘narratives’ we have in mind only those of the purely discursive variety—i.e. those complex representations that relate and describe the course of some unique series of events, however humble, in a coherent but selective arrangement.¹ Our capacity to create, enjoy and benefit from narratives so defined—be they factual or fictive—surely sets us apart from other creatures. Some, impressed by the prominence of this phenomenon in the traffic of human life, have been tempted to deploy that famous Aristotelian formula, holding that we are, inter alia, not just social or rational or political animals but that we are also rightly distinguished as narrative or story-telling animals.

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Narrative and Understanding Persons

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Our world is replete with narratives—narratives of our making that are uniquely appreciated by us. This can hardly be denied, certainly if by ‘narratives’ we have in mind only those of the purely discursive variety—i.e. those complex representations that relate and describe the course of some unique series of events, however humble, in a coherent but selective arrangement.¹ Our capacity to create, enjoy and benefit from narratives so defined—be they factual or fictive—surely sets us apart from other creatures. Some, impressed by the prominence of this phenomenon in the traffic of human life, have been tempted to deploy that famous Aristotelian formula, holding that we are, *inter alia*, not just social or rational or political animals but that we are also rightly distinguished as *narrative* or *story-telling* animals.

This observation peaks philosophical interest in diverse ways. We might wonder: what, if anything, are the identifying features of narratives? What is the basis of our unique narrative capacities? Which cognitive and imaginative capacities enable us to produce and appreciate them? What roles or functions might narratives play in our lives? Although not exclusively, most of the papers collected

¹ This emphasis on the essentially discursive nature of narratives is consonant with a number of working definitions that have proposed to help us better understand the notion. See for example: G. Prince, *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative* (The Hague: Mouton, 1982), 4; J. Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 43; P. Lamarque and S. Olsen, *Truth, Fiction and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 225; N. Carroll, *Beyond Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 126. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there is no agreed definition or criterion for sharply identifying narratives—and certainly none couched in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. If it is thought that this is a serious concern about the philosophical usefulness of the notion then it must also be noted that we are no worse off in this regard than when we make free use of notions of such ‘knowledge’ or ‘causation’ (at least, as things stand). It seems we have little choice but to work with our pre-theoretic, unanalysed—ordinary—understanding of narratives. We can make clear enough what we mean by means of examples, if need be.

Daniel D. Hutto

in this volume touch on this last question in one way or another (even if only by adopting a sceptical tone that urges caution about our expectations in this regard). The fact is that claims about what narratives ‘do for us’ range from the modest to the downright remarkable. The nine original contributions contained in this anthology divide into two types: those which clarify or warn against existing claims that have been made about the importance of narratives in our lives and those which advance new proposals on this topic. The first three papers fall into the latter category—advancing, in turn, distinct claims that narratives are implicated in, if not essential for: (a) enabling us to exercise our imaginations in unique ways; (b) developing our everyday understanding of actions performed for reasons; and (c) external reflection, evaluation and orientation in our understanding of the situations of ourselves and others.

In ‘Framing Narratives’, Gregory Currie considers how our engagements with fictional narratives—complex representational artefacts—allow us to exercise our imaginations, extending them to novel topics and in novel ways. He advances the view that apart from grasping an author’s communicative intentions about the represented storied events, an important part of engaging with narratives involves the adoption of ‘frameworks’, for readers or listeners not only note what happens in stories, they are also ‘encouraged to adopt a *way of engaging* imaginatively with those events’ (Currie, this volume). This is quite distinct from the kind of imaginative demands required to apprehend a story’s content—as detailed by its plot or *fabula*. Adopting a framework is instead to adopt a kind of attitudinal and emotional stance—in effect, it is to don a ‘new persona’ at the invitation of the narrative itself and the way it is constructed. Whether or not the invitation is issued by the author, it is our ability to engage with narratives in this sort of way that is responsible for their enabling us to see things in new ways (and not just to imagine new things).

Currie maintains that, so understood, the ‘motives and mechanisms’ that drive framework adoption are equally at work in other visceral and imaginative engagements; for example those that characterise joint attentional encounters. In both cases, subpersonal mechanisms for imitative and emotional responding are brought to bear.² Thus, even though consumers of narratives are not always in

² For this reason, he denies that the process is best understood in terms of developing a ‘theory’ (even if a not very explicit one) about the persona embedded in narrative.

Narrative and Understanding Persons

the company of real others, both activities involve emotional and imaginative positionings. Often one harmoniously resonates with—even comes to identify with—another during joint attention. And the same can hold true of the way we engage with a given narrative. The important difference is that in the latter case even if one is not responding to another living human being one is still resonating with a personality (and never merely with a text), though the personality might not be that of the author. Importantly, we need not always identify with personas on offer; we can also react against or resist them. And this fact, Currie argues, sheds light on the problem of imaginative resistance, which is experienced when one is repelled by certain narratives. By distinguishing a narrative content from its framework, Currie offers a bifurcated account of the different kinds of imaginative abilities that must be employed when it comes to understanding and appreciating narratives. As a result, we can distinguish two importantly different varieties of imaginative dissonance that occur when we attempt to engage with some narratives—one being more intellectual than the other.

In his paper ‘The Narrative Practice Hypothesis’, Hutto identifies a quite different role that narratives might play in our lives—that of enabling us to use and develop our characteristic ability to make sense of intentional action as being performed for a reason. His proposal consists of two novel, complementary claims. The first is that our everyday understanding of intentional action is itself an essentially narrative practice—i.e. that ‘folk psychological’ understanding always takes the form of constructing narratives. The second is that children acquire the relevant interpretative skills for achieving this through repeated encounters with specific kinds of narratives, when they are appropriately supported by others. This is the normal route through which we become familiar with both the core principles of folk psychology and the norm-governed possibilities for wielding it in practice, i.e. knowing how and when to use it.

This goes against the received view that our everyday folk psychological abilities are a special kind of native cognitive endowment; one gifted to us by our evolutionary forefathers. Rather than supposing that this capacity depends upon or presupposes inherited ‘theory of mind’ abilities, Hutto argues, in contrast, that we each normally acquire a skilled understanding of basic folk psychology for the first time in ontogeny by engaging with narratives with a special subject matter—i.e. those which are about protagonists who act for reasons. In this, children must have the appropriate support of their carers, with whom these narratives,

Daniel D. Hutto

understood as complex representations, are objects of joint attention. Emphasizing this last point, Hutto takes a leaf out of Sellars' book and underlines the essentially intersubjective, socially scaffolded basis of our capacity to understand ourselves and others as those who act for reasons.

In 'Dramatic Irony, Narrative and the External Perspective' Peter Goldie emphasizes the important role that narratives play in enabling us to take up third-personal, but not impersonal, perspectives on the situations of others. This, he holds, is necessary if we are to engage with them properly. He contrasts this activity with that of perspective shifting of the sort in which one either imagines being in the shoes of the other or imagines being the other, taking on the relevant traits and dispositions oneself. On the supposition that in most cases we already have a reasonable grasp of the thoughts and feelings of others, Goldie's focus is on the question of 'how are we best to use the psychological resources at our disposal, including our imagination, to engage with these thoughts and feelings' (Goldie, this volume). In this context, echoing certain well-known criticisms of simulation theory, he worries that 'perspective shifting' accounts run the risk of leading us to *over*-identify with the other in ways that prevent or make it impossible to achieve an adequate appraisal or evaluation of their situation. Only in standing back, in grasping the wider details of the other's story—by appreciating dramatic ironies that are only visible from a distant, external stance—are we able to make the appropriate assessments.

Goldie's conclusion lends support to the popular idea that self-narratives are crucial vehicles for reflecting upon our lives and actions—that they make possible certain prominent kinds of our ethical and personal development. For example, autobiographical snippets, whether issued as remembrances of self-dialogue or in the natural course of conversing with others, serve as objects of reflection and review.³ This sort of activity provides the fodder for steering and leading our lives in ways that other, less articulate creatures simply cannot.

³ Autobiographical self-narratives, however short, reveal more than just the 'facts' about our situations (to the extent that they succeed even in that); their content and composition also reveals something about their authors—about their character and concerns. Something shows through in what one chooses to highlight about oneself and how this is done. It may be that these expressions are importantly influenced by our wider vision of ourselves. Bruner and Kalmar have explored this thought, framing it in

Narrative and Understanding Persons

As such, ‘the narratives we weave about our lives can profoundly affect how we respond to our past and how we lead our lives in the future’.⁴ Only creatures capable of this kind of articulate self-scrutiny can make choices based on the higher-order reflection of first-order desires and tendencies.⁵ Personal development based on such self-examination is neither thought to be straightforward nor easy, especially since what one is aiming at is not clearly defined in advance. In this respect it contrasts with the way we prosecute our more finite projects and it is for this reason that it has been frequently likened to embarking on a kind of medieval quest.⁶ It goes without saying that if narratives did play any or all of these important roles, they would be phenomena of great philosophical significance.

Even so, these claims are comparatively modest. For some have taken a further step, holding that narrative activity is not only crucially important to human being in the sort of ways outlined above—they claim it is its *very core*. This view is enshrined in the idea that narratives are not just uniquely human creations of special importance but, as persons, we each and every one of us, are the unique creations of a special sort of narrative activity! Human selves just *are* narrative constructions. So seriously is that idea

the following way: “Typically, we tell ourselves about our own Self and about other Selves in the form of a story. These stories, however, seem to fall into narrative genres. Is this only a convention, or is it a necessary condition of self-telling?” (J. Bruner and D. A. Kalmar, ‘Narrative and Metanarrative in the Construction of Self’, *Self-awareness: Its Nature and Development*, M. Ferrari and R. J. Sternberg (eds.) (New York: Guilford, 1988), 308–331, 318). However, when we answer that question it seems clear that narrative expressions are a unique way of *manifesting* ourselves.

⁴ P. Goldie, *On Personality* (London: Routledge, 2004), 117.

⁵ For Taylor this equates to making ‘strong evaluations’, i.e. comparative judgements about our first-order desires, inclinations and choices. In doing this, he too holds that it is necessary to make use of an independent standard—one that we ought to acknowledge. C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 4.

⁶ See *ibid.*, p. 48; A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1984), 219.

Daniel D. Hutto

entertained by some that it has even been proposed that ‘we as a species might be appropriately named *Homo narrans* rather than *Homo sapiens*’.⁷

At first blush, such a re-designation and the claim about our nature upon which it is based may appear extravagant. Yet it would be difficult to overestimate the seductive attraction it holds for popular and scientific imaginations. I was reminded of this while taking a break from preparing this very introduction. I embarked on an expedition to the Science Museum in London in order to fulfil a promise to my eldest son, only to happen upon an exhibition entitled ‘100 years of psychology in Britain’. Serendipitously, there we saw the following words:

Telling Stories

Once upon a time, it was believed that stories merely recorded what happened in the world. But some modern psychologists have come to regard stories as having almost supernatural power. What we call ‘human nature’ is now thought by some to be created by language, by conversations, narratives, folk-tales, songs and poetry. We literally talk ourselves into existence.

This is headline grabbing stuff. If we take it seriously, the very idea naturally invites a host of questions. For example, we might wonder: How can *we* be the products of acts of narration, if in some sense we are responsible for the production of the relevant self-making narratives? This is an especially pressing question since proponents of the narrative self-constitution view are typically loathe to recognise the existence of narrative-transcendent selves—the kinds of selves that might play this logical role, acting as narrators. Instead, they have tended to attempt to make sense of the idea that human beings develop their ability to weave self-narratives slowly, over time. Additionally, it is often supposed that this process of development is socially mediated and scaffolded.⁸ Through discrete stages human children gradually

⁷ R. A. Neimeyer, ‘Community and Coherence: Narrative Contributions to the Psychology of Conflict and Loss’, *Narrative and Consciousness: Literature, Psychology and the Brain*, G. D. Fireman, T. E. McVay, and O. J. Flanagan (eds.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 167.

⁸ For example, a major part of the notion I have of ‘myself’—that is as a person exhibiting certain characteristics and fulfilling certain roles—is parasitic on my grasp of the canonical forms provided by my society. For example, the characters we encounter, both real and fictional, serve as models for my own self-understanding. Developmentally speaking, one

Narrative and Understanding Persons

learn to form explicit self-narratives. Allegedly this enables them, not merely to describe and express themselves in new ways, but to become selves in the first place. These selves, as we know, become increasingly more elaborate and complex over time.

As a result, certainly in the early stages, ‘we (unlike professional human storytellers) do not consciously and deliberately figure out what narratives to tell and how to tell them. Our tales are spun, but for the most part we don’t spin them: they spin us’.⁹ Accordingly, it is a mistake to think of your storyteller—the ‘I’—as a self that exists independently, over and above the narratives that might be told about it. This is in line with the fact that it seems that the only way to characterise any such ‘self’—the only way of giving it any substance—is to supply some sort of narrative or other about it.¹⁰

Reasoning of this sort is predicated upon the strong claim that ‘our interpretation of ourselves is constitutive of what we are’.¹¹ The fashioning of any self worthy of the name is the outcome of a peculiar kind of hermeneutic activity. Consequently, personhood is not an automatic birthright of all human beings—and it looks like it may be forever denied to other species of animal. Schechtman makes explicit this consequence of the strong reading of the

learns to take up a ‘story-telling’ stance towards one’s own actions just the way one learns to do so towards the actions of others.

⁹ D. C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 418.

¹⁰ Any substantive answer to the question ‘Who am I?’ requires an act of narrative self-expression (O. Flanagan, *Self Expressions: Mind, Morals and the Meaning of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). Here we need more than a logical placeholder—a philosopher’s ‘I’. What we are after is a full-fledged ‘me’. Being a ‘me’ requires having a persona (at least one!) that is tied to certain actions, reasons, projects, goals, and choices, which are only understood by looking both to the person’s past and future. To be interested in this is to be concerned with the characterisation problem of personal identity and opposed to its more famous cousin the re-identification problem (the two are often confused or conflated, to no good effect).

¹¹ C. Taylor, ‘Self-Interpreting Animals’, *Human Agency and Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 47.

Daniel D. Hutto

narrative self-constitution view: ‘Some, but not all, individuals weave stories of their lives, and it is their doing so that makes them persons’.¹²

This idea about what it is to be a person is frequently combined with the claim that this self-constituting narrative activity is necessary for ethical flourishing; i.e. it is the basis for the development of selves of the morally significant kind. Our self-narratives, it is held by some, are the means by which we navigate in moral space, orienting towards the good. It is usual that the scope of this activity is thought to be writ large: ‘In many narratives the self seeks its identity on the scale of an entire life’.¹³ Or, as Taylor famously remarks, ‘as I project my life forward and endorse the existing direction and give it a new one, I project a future story, not just a state of the momentary future but a bent for my whole life to come’.¹⁴

These are very bold claims about the role and importance of narratives in our lives, and they invite philosophical critique. In his important piece ‘Against Narrativity’ Galen Strawson raised some serious challenges for those who assume that because some people have narrativizing tendencies when thinking about their lives, all do (a descriptive claim about human psychology). He also denounced as pernicious the (normative) claim that one must exhibit narrative tendencies in order to be truly ethical or lead a flourishing human life, defending instead the idea that there exists a range of possibilities for temporal self-experience. In this world, he claims, there are Episodics, Diachronics, non-Narratives and Narratives—each of whom enjoys distinct modes of self-experience. As the labels imply, only members of the latter class necessarily exhibit narrativizing tendencies of a non-trivial kind. If this is right, the narrativity thesis is false as an unrestricted claim about the character of human self-consciousness; not everyone tends to *experience* or *live* or *see* his or her life in a storied way. But more than this, Strawson has argued that none of these types can lay claim to ethical superiority.

¹² M. Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 94. The clear implication is that those unable to tell stories about themselves—those who cannot self-interpret, although immune from self-deception, buy this at the cost of being cut off from the possibility of self-knowledge and ethical development.

¹³ P. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), 114–115.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 48.

Narrative and Understanding Persons

Recapitulating and extending the latter critique in his contribution to this volume, 'Episodic Ethics', Strawson devotes himself to the task of undermining the claim that seeing one's life in narrative terms is an essential requirement of genuine human flourishing or moral being. His strategy is to demonstrate the falsity of this idea by establishing that living or experiencing life in an Episodic fashion—in which one does not regard one's self as something that persists in such a way that it was there in the (further) past and will be there in the (further) future—in no way impairs one's capacity to live an ethically and emotionally rich life. Consideration is given to the capacity of Episodics to experience negative moral emotions such as remorse, contrition, regret and guilt. These topics receive separate discussions in the essay.¹⁵ Crucially, it is argued that having the morally relevant occurrent emotions and dispositions does not depend essentially on any particular mode of self-understanding or relating. We can be sure of this, he suggests, because the psychological mechanisms that inculcate and sustain moral behaviour—such as those of conscience and responsibility—are much more ancient than the Diachronic (let alone Narrative) modes of self-experience. On this point Strawson defends what he calls the Emotional Priority Thesis, in an attempt to ensure that the dependencies are understood the right way around. As a result, the content of moral experience and the focus of moral rebuke or praise should always be one's present dispositions—one's currently existing ethical virtues and vices. Accordingly we are told that, 'the heart of moral responsibility considered as psychological phenomenon is just a sort of instinctive responsiveness to things [and as such]... Moral responsibility in this fundamental sense is non-historical' (Strawson, this volume). The paper concludes by considering whether there are any other morally relevant traits—such as loyalty, gratitude, vengefulness, etc.—that are beyond the reach of Episodics. The verdict is that while certain temporal temperaments may be associated with certain traits more than others, nothing logically bars non-Narratives from exhibiting them in their own way—thus nothing prevents them from leading fully ethical lives.

Striking a similarly critical tone, Peter Lamarque emphasizes the important differences between literary narratives and those we find in the dialogues and conversations of everyday life. Against the popular narrativist trend, he warns of the serious dangers of

¹⁵ For example, it is argued that guilt 'adds nothing to moral being' and that 'it is to be sure a chimpanzee thing' (this volume).

Daniel D. Hutto

transposing (or more precisely, imposing) the former onto the latter; the risk of 'aestheticizing if not fictionalizing, real lives'. This happens, for example, when direct comparisons are made between a reader's life and that of some specific literary character or episode from literature. Such attempts operate on the supposition that art can—in important and illuminating ways—'hold up a mirror to life.' They are witnessed in the tendency to use literary examples as bases for influencing the direction of one's life or to inform activities of self-understanding and self-creation. Lamarque finds this especially worrisome. He maintains that any attempt to model our lives on those of literary figures is ill-founded because the degree of fit between the two is so poor. Such endeavours either involve taking over too much from art to life in a potentially dangerous way or, worse still, they promote a diminished understanding of what makes great literature great, i.e. by ignoring its unique qualities. Any successful attempt to treat literary characters as friends or as guiding exemplars would require us to bracket all of their specifically 'literary' properties.

In making this case, Lamarque cites five important principles that detail the precise ways in which literature is special. For example, we are reminded, *inter alia*, that the very existence of literary characters is entirely description-dependent; that their nature is determined by their being elements in a larger artistic canvas; and that every detail of a literary work admits of questions concerning its aesthetic significance with respect to the whole. In line with this, it is observed that the kind of explanation that is appropriate for making sense of literary actions and events differs sharply from the causal and rational varieties used in everyday life. Together these reflections underline a true gap between real-life and literary narratives. As a consequence it is concluded that insofar as accounts of narrative identity or self-constitution rely on making serious comparisons with literary characters or works, they are shown to be absurd and untenable.

In 'Reasons to be Fearful', Kathy Behrendt focuses on a topic—death—which she argues poses special challenges for both the Episodic view of the self promoted by Strawson and those narrativist accounts which model lives too directly on stories (i.e. those that, like conventional works of literature, have 'beginnings, middles and ends'). Strawson, as noted above, is of the view that there are many selves. Although they exist for variable duration, these are short-lived entities as compared with the human beings to whom they bear a special relation. This feature of Strawson's account is used to raise worries about the rational basis of his

Narrative and Understanding Persons

fearing death despite the fact that his self-experience is of the Episodic sort. The tension, Behrendt claims, is that he recognizes that his death must come after any future events in his life—i.e. it is an event which he, *qua* this present mental entity, will not undergo. Nevertheless, he holds that the threat of an infinitude of non-existence posed by death reasonably carries emotional import for him. Behrendt objects to this explanation on several grounds; her chief complaint is that it falls foul of the ‘temporal fallacy’ in that it wrongly treats death as an ‘eternal state of affairs’—one that is directly comparable to what goes on in life. Moreover, Strawson’s official reason for fearing death would give him equal reason to fear the infinity of non-existence that preceded his birth, by parity of reasoning. Consequently, she concludes, although it may be a fact that Strawson fears his death, there is no reason to do so in light of his episodic experiential tendencies. An illuminating comparison is then made between Strawson’s anti-narrative views and traditional Epicurean offerings; both are ultimately regarded as debarring rational accommodation of this fear.

Even so, such a-rationalism may be superior to narrativist attempts to deal with this topic. For those who see lives in storied terms tend to think that we should not treat death *per se* as bad or regrettable, only premature death—i.e. the sort which interrupts a life before it has reached its ‘proper’ conclusion. But, Behrendt claims, this simply isn’t the normal attitude that people—even those with narrativist tendencies—routinely take towards their own impending death. Moreover, she holds that it is not an attitude they can adopt unproblematically. For, to do so is to foreclose on life’s possibilities in a restrictive and artificial way, and one which is at odds with the narrativist commitment to a view of life as fraught with possibilities and projecting towards a future. Also, once again, to hold this sort of view is to mistakenly treat death as ‘an event in life’—as the concluding moment of each of our life-stories. Apart from misunderstanding the nature of death, this is problematic for the narrativist for other reasons too; for one’s death is surely not an event that one can weave into a self-constituting narrative. Behrendt recognizes that some philosophers only seek to endorse the weaker view that narratives play a central role in shaping our lives without claiming that we in fact think of our lives in storied terms (or should do so). Yet she offers reasons for thinking that this softer rendering of the narrative account ‘risks becoming a conceit’. In sum, it is concluded that our attitude towards death resists rational treatment by those with narrative and non-narrative tendencies alike.

Daniel D. Hutto

In the light of these criticisms, it seems desirable for those attracted to the narrative self-constitution view to seek to develop its more modest variants. One need not defend the view that the relevant narrative activity necessarily involves having an encompassing vision or story of one's life as a *whole* or that the narratives in question must be modelled on those of literature. For example, the self-narratives in question may be shorter than the shortest short story. In responding to MacIntyre on this very point, Cooper once convincingly argued that reason-giving explanations are in effect 'little narratives', designed to make our actions intelligible occasion by occasion. And, as he insisted, it 'would be illegitimate to extrapolate from the existence of these little narratives to a grand narrative of a life-as-a-whole'.¹⁶ Others have recognised this too: 'Like plans, these narratives can be 'larger' or 'smaller', structured hierarchically, from a narrative about a whole life, right down the 'mini-narrative' that you might tell of this morning you got up, got dressed and had breakfast'.¹⁷ This seems to highlight an important difference in the roles that shorter self-narratives and those of the meta-variety might play. This suggests a more modest rendering of the narrative self-constitution thesis: perhaps selves need not always be built from knitting together a series of mini-narratives in order to form an 'omnibus' edition. Indeed, for some, this latter activity may simply be impossible for various reasons.¹⁸

Obviously, what one says on this score matters to the content and assessment of the narrative self-constitution view. For example, it was noted above that Galen Strawson argues fiercely against the truth of the psychological narrativity thesis, descriptively construed. He holds that it is false in any *non-trivial* sense. But, crucially, he fashions his criterion of triviality with direct reference to Taylor. Thus Strawson allows that many everyday activities—his own example is that of coffee-making—might involve past appraisal and future planning of a quite *limited* scope—and to this extent he allows that they might be said to involve narration in an uninteresting sense.¹⁹ Yet, it is arguable that, far from being trivial, these narratives ought to be at the centre of our attention in

¹⁶ D. Cooper, 'Life and Narrative', *International Journal of Moral and Social Studies* 3, 1988, 161–172, 165.

¹⁷ P. Goldie, op. cit. note 4, 116.

¹⁸ Bruner and Kalmar focus on what 'impels and deters' from production of such meta-narratives, op. cit. note 4.

¹⁹ See G. Strawson, 'Against Narrativity', *Ratio* 17 (2004), 428–542, reprinted in *The Self?*, G. Strawson (ed.) (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 73.

Narrative and Understanding Persons

understanding certain self-directed activity as much as those of the more meta-variety. If so, this would presumably close the gap between the Episodic, Diachronic and Narrative temperaments, which Strawson identifies.

This theme is picked up and developed by Schechtman in her contribution. In direct response to Strawson's worries, she sets out to clarify and refine her original narrative self-constitution thesis. Crucially, a useful taxonomy is provided by considering a range of possible answers to three important questions: What counts as a life narrative? What count as having a narrative? And, what are the practical implications of having (or failing to have) a narrative? Narrative views exist along a continuum precisely because any given one might advance stronger or weaker replies to each of these questions. Like Goldilocks (and baby bear), Schechtman prefers a moderate response every time. Locating her own account in the mid-range, while she denies that the construction of self-narratives can be understood as purely sub-personal activity, it is equally not something that need be an explicit project. So understood, 'there is no requirement that an identity constituting narrative have a unifying theme, or represent a quest or have a well defined plot that fits a distinct literary genera'.

More than this, she now identifies two distinct but inter-related strands within her position. These speak to different questions about personal identity that come into view when we distinguish 'selves' of the Strawsonian Episodic variety—i.e. psychological entities that are the subjects of experience—from 'persons'—whose existence implies longer term social relations, commitments and responsibilities. To be a person is to exist in such way as to be open to moral and legal accountability, and for it to make sense that one has concerns for one's future and continued survival. Selves, by way of contrast, are less public and less long-lasting. They are bound up with certain actions and experiences in a strong way that is affectively salient, thus only certain phases of our existence are identity-conferring with respect to selfhood. Accordingly, persons and selves are constituted by different kinds of self-narratives, in different ways; the life of a single person may be comprised of many distinct shorter narratives. Acknowledging this distinction yields a more nuanced and multi-faceted version of the narrative self-constitution view. A complete account of personal identity, Schechtman claims, requires attending to both aspects. Not only does this division of labour provide the basis for a more refined, two-tiered narrative account of personal identity, she claims that it is compatible with Strawson's observations in a way that defuses his

Daniel D. Hutto

primary objections. Nevertheless, disagreements are likely to remain—the paper concludes by considering those that are most likely and important.

Focusing on how to best understand the correct interface between phenomenology and hermeneutics, Dan Zahavi raises concerns about narrative accounts of the self from a different direction—and in a way that matters in the light of Schechtman's proposed refinements. After providing an extremely valuable short review of prominent positions in the literature, he stresses limits and potentially distorting effects of the narrative view of the self, if it is adopted as the only way of legitimately understanding selfhood. Specifically, he attempts to demonstrate that unqualified, extreme narrative approaches to the self are limited in two important respects. Fundamentally, they fail to recognize appropriately the existence of a core consciousness of the sort that is primitive and pre-reflective; one is bound up with non-discursive ways of being in the world—i.e. the kinds of consciousness that are associated with the having of a first person perspective, experiences of embodied ownership and the like. Since such experiences are phenomenologically salient, if Zahavi is right to claim that 'it doesn't make sense to speak of a first-person perspective without speaking of a self' then it seems we have little option but to acknowledge the existence of non-narrative selves. Relatedly, it is complained that this failure makes it impossible for proponents of exclusively narrative accounts of selfhood to make adequate sense of the experience of 'otherness' of the sort that has been highlighted by Sartre and Lévinas. To regard others as always completely accessible to us by means of some narrative or other is unfaithful to aspects of our phenomenology. Despite these criticisms, Zahavi makes it clear however that he sees a potential partnership between different treatments of core and narratively extended forms of consciousness, holding out hope that phenomenology and hermeneutics may yet prove to be complementary.

Gallagher's concluding contribution provides a good example of how this might be achieved. Recognizing that narratively constituted selves are not the *only* selves, he concentrates on explicating the underlying cognitive capacities that underpin our basic narrative competency—those which make it possible to enjoy the developmental opportunities that engaging in intersubjective, socially framed narrative practices provide. To benefit from these requires capacities not only for understanding narratives but also a basic kind of narrative understanding. Focusing on the capacity to generate coherent self-narratives, he distinguishes and discusses

Narrative and Understanding Persons

four non-negotiable pre-requisites. These comprise capacities for temporal ordering (constituting two sub-abilities that relate, on the one hand, to the objective ordering of events and, on the other, to the capacity to situate past and future happenings egocentrically); minimal self-reference; episodic and autobiographical memory; and metacognition. Each of these capacities is discussed in its own right, but so too are the complex dependencies and inter-dependencies between them.

Picking up on a familiar thread, Gallagher argues that the ultimate pay-off of exercising our narrative competencies in the right way and in the right conditions is the development of a narrative self. But, like Schechtman, he opts for a modest understanding of such selves, holding that 'The narrative self may be more than a simple abstract point of interesting narratives, but less than a unified product of a consistent narrative' (Gallagher, this volume). Indeed, he holds that narratively constituted selves will be more or less stable and unified and that they are always at serious risk of self-deception, confabulation and the like. This is illustrated in his concluding discussion of the deficits in narrative competency, as present in dynarrativia and various forms of schizophrenia, which serve as powerful reminders of the value and importance of our capacity to form coherent and stable, if less than fully unified, self-narratives.

